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ABSTRACT

This document is the eighth in a series of 12 early childhood program descriptions compiled by the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development. The program described here is the Ameliorative Program developed by Merle Karnes at the University of Illinois in Champaign, Illinois. The Ameliorative Program is designed to prepare young disadvantaged children for effective participation in a standard school program. The developers of the Ameliorative Program classify the concepts and skills they consider prerequisites to academic success into three areas: (1) language development-reading readiness, (2) math, and (3) science-social studies. There are numerous curriculum guides for teachers in each curriculum area with stated behavioral objectives and corresponding criterion tasks for each lesson. Extensive evaluation studies have shown the effectiveness of the program. Included in the program description are brief outlines of: (1) goals and objectives, (2) content and materials, (3) classroom activities, (4) parent involvement, (5) professional and paraprofessional training, (6) administrative requirements and costs, (7) program development and evaluation, and (8) program history and present (1971) status. (JMB)

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Early Childhood
Information Unit
November, 1971

Program Summary

AMELIORATIVE PROGRAM

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GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

The major goal of the Ameliorative Program is to "prepare the young disadvantaged child for effective participation in a standard school program." By this the developers mean providing students with good attitudes about themselves and school and equipping them with the necessary cognitive, or learning skills to succeed. The developers have listed subgoals in the following way:

1. To enhance cognitive development, particularly language
2. To develop motivation conducive to learning
3. To acquire effective information-processing skills
4. To develop a positive self-concept
5. To enhance social and emotional development
6. To promote motor skills
7. To encourage parental participation, and
8. To enhance staff competencies.

CONTENT AND MATERIALS:

The developers of the Ameliorative Program emphasize the basic concepts and skills they consider prerequisites to academic success in the early elementary years. These concepts and skills are taught in three areas: language development-reading readiness; math; and science-social studies.

There are numerous curriculum guides for teachers in each curriculum area. Each lesson has stated behavioral objectives with corresponding "criterion tasks." Criterion tasks help the teacher assess whether or not children have learned what each lesson was designed to teach. These behavioral objectives and criterion tasks inform the teacher of the children's progress and special needs. They also alert the teacher to examine the effectiveness of her teaching.

In the area of science-social studies, curriculum starts with a body awareness unit that includes body exercises, songs, precut unassembled figures, and body outlines of the children in the class. This is followed by a unit on family members and home environment where children cut clothing ads from catalogs and sort them according to body parts, and go-together pictures such as chair and table, hand and glove. Other units include community buildings, workers, and seasons.

The math curriculum focuses on basic number concepts and manipulative skills and also teaches a math vocabulary. The following general math areas are stressed: identification of five geometric shapes; one-

to-one matching and how it relates to copying patterns; matching quantity; establishing sets; counting; dimension and seriation; numerals as visual symbols; and beginning addition and subtraction with manipulative objects.

In the language development-reading readiness curriculum, teachers often read to the children. They learn to hold books correctly, turn the pages in sequence, associate the pictures with the spoken word, and develop a left-to-right progression. In other activities visual-motor coordination and visual-auditory discriminations are emphasized. The program places the highest priority on language development and this area receives the major emphasis each day. Manipulative materials such as puzzles and lotto games are chosen to enable the teacher to elicit verbal responses from the children.

Teachers using the Ameliorative Program plan activities, evaluate the children's progress, and have daily briefing sessions with aides and volunteers about how well the program is working with their class. Curriculum guides are not expected to be followed verbatim. The developers feel that the lesson plans can serve only as model plans and that meaningful and effective curriculam must be developed by teachers. The developers suggest that when planning lessons, teachers must not only consider their own talents and limitations in devising new activities, but must also pay close attention to the interests and needs of the children. The only real requirement for planning lessons is that they be structured to require verbal responses from the children.

To help determine linguistic strengths and weaknesses of children, the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities, (ITPA), is used. The ITPA subtests include areas such as grammatic closure, auditory association, visual association, and visual decoding. Using these subtests of the ITPA, teachers and trained aides and volunteers prepare diagnostic profiles on each child at the beginning of the year. These profiles are then used in planning appropriate learning activities according to individual strengths and weaknesses. The ITPA profile helps the teacher to see if he is spending appropriate amounts of time and work in those areas covered by the subtests, and helps him maintain a more individualized form of teaching.

The materials for the Ameliorative Program are not yet commercially available, but the developers expect to have them ready for distribution sometime in 1972. These materials will include some 1500 lesson plans packaged in approximately 23 books. In addition to the guides, a variety of inexpensive manipulative materials will be required for each class using the program.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:

The typical class in the Ameliorative curriculum consists of 15 children. Children are assigned to

instructional groups on the basis of ability (Binet IQ). Each instructional group generally has five children assigned to it.

A typical day in the Ameliorative Program gets under way with a teacher planning session where teachers discuss the plans for the day and prepare to demonstrate any new materials to be used. After the children arrive and eat a breakfast snack, spontaneous conversation takes place. Children are then ready for the first structured period. Language development-reading readiness, math, and science-social studies are taught during these structured periods and they last from fifteen to twenty-five minutes each. In each of the structured periods incorrect responses are immediately corrected and the appropriate, or correct, responses are reinforced by verbal praise. In this way children are constantly reassured as to their own competencies, and the developers hope they will be more motivated to learn.

In addition to the structured periods, the children are allowed to form their own groups for music and directed play. At the end of the class, teachers sit down for an evaluation session and discuss both the progress of the children and the success of the lessons used that day. This schedule can be adapted for half-days or full days; story-time, sleep periods, and meals can be added accordingly.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT:

After receiving training from the classroom teacher, parents may work as aides and volunteers in the classroom. Parent involvement helps the program gain community support and it also provides employment for many mothers from low income families.

PROFESSIONAL AND PARAPROFESSIONAL TRAINING:

Teacher training is an ongoing process. Activities are planned each day, and successes and failures are recounted in open discussions. "Debriefing" sessions are held often to relieve built-up tensions and promote positive attitudes on the part of the teachers, aides, and volunteers. Aides and volunteers are generally mothers or older sisters of children in the class. They are trained and supervised by the certified teachers. The developers do not provide materials for training.

ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS AND COSTS:

No special administrative requirements are specified. As the program materials are not yet available commercially, it is premature to estimate the costs of implementing the Ameliorative Program.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION:

The program relied heavily on two conceptual models--the Guilford's Structure of Intellect and the basis for the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities. The developers also drew heavily from other researchers. For example, the decision to use behavioral objectives was largely the result of Mager's work (1962, 1968); the emphasis on positive reinforcement can be linked to studies that indicate that learning may be best accomplished by positive reinforcements and rewards. Other research in the area of parental involvement (Karnes, 1969) revealed that low income parents can be taught teaching competencies which will result in acceleration of their children's learning abilities. These, and other findings influenced the final design of the Ameliorative Program.

Extensive evaluation studies using control groups have demonstrated gains in IQ, language development, vocabulary comprehension, and visual perception for children in the Ameliorative Program. The most comprehensive of these studies compared the effectiveness of four preschool intervention programs.

The four programs evaluated included:

1. a Traditional nursery school program that used music, art, and outdoor play activities to promote personal, motor, social, and language development;

2. a Community-Integrated program similar to the traditional school except that it operated at four neighborhood centers and was integrated socioeconomically;

3. a Montessori program; and

4. a structured Experimental program identical to the Ameliorative Program described in this summary.

Children were screened to ensure comparability in the areas of age, sex, race, IQ, and socioeconomic status. The following tests were administered at pre- and posttest settings:

1. Stanford-Binet Individual Intelligence Scale, Form L-M, 1960;
2. Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities (ITPA), experimental edition, 1961;
3. Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, and
4. The Frostig Development Test of Visual Perception (posttest only).

GROUP	BINET MEAN IQ		ITPA DIFFERENCE SCORE MEANS IN MONTH		BINET MEAN IQ	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Traditional	94.5	102.6	-5.3	-1.0	80.2	92.6
Community-Integrated	93.3	98.4	-6.3	-5.2	81.4	85.6
Montessori	94.1	99.6	-3.9	-5.3	83.3	87.3
Experimental	96.0	110.3	-3.3	2.9	85.8	96.1

The developers feel that these data strongly support the effectiveness of the program. The Traditional and the Experimental programs both showed substantial increases in scores on these measures.

PROGRAM HISTORY AND PRESENT STATUS:

Work on the Ameliorative Program formally began in 1965 with a research grant from the U.S. Office of Education. The grant terminated in 1970. During the five years of development, the program staff under the direction of Dr. Merle B. Karnes, have tested the program in different settings with various staffing patterns. For example, the program was tested with a paraprofessional staff consisting of teenage sisters of preschool children, and also with children who were at the same time being taught at home by their mothers. Results of these evaluations may be obtained from the developer.

The year 1970-71 has been spent on further field testing, completing the final editing of the materials, and negotiating with publishers so that the program may soon be disseminated nationally.

The developers have expressed a willingness to disseminate working papers, evaluation studies, and other descriptive materials about the Ameliorative Program to interested persons and ask that all inquiries be directed to the Institute for Research on Exceptional Children. They ask also to be contacted regarding the exact date of commercial release of materials.